



Organized June 4, 1894 Incorporated January 20, 1901.

North Dakota Firefighter's Association

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February 4, 2002

Chairman Michael Powell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Proceeding # 01-348

Dear Chairman Powell:

I am writing to express concern over the lack of high-speed Internet access in rural states like North Dakota.

As Executive Director for the North Dakota Rural Firefighter's Association, I am always looking for ways to make training dollars stretch further. However, we cannot take advantage of online training options because of the lack of high-speed Internet access. Many of these firefighters live in small communities who do not have access to high-speed Internet services like DSL or cable Internet.

But there's another option that I'm aware of that would benefit rural North Dakotans ~ high-speed Internet access via a satellite dish. And I have heard that the formation of EchoStar from both DirecTV and Dish Network would provide competitively priced, high-speed Internet access. This would be a great option for those rural North Dakotans who live too far out of town to get high-speed DSL or cable Internet service.

I don't know whether there will be a vote in the U.S. Senate on this issue, but I hope you can support this merger because of the great effects it will have on a rural state like North Dakota. We need options to help bridge the "digital divide."

Sincerely,

Lois Hartman
Executive Director